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ABSTRACT

The 12 fact sheets in this series address fundamental aspects of starting a school-age child care program. Topics addressed include: (1) the planning process; (2) needs assessment; (3) establishment of cooperative relationships with schools; (4) selection of school space for programs; (5) arrangement of the environment; (6) program design; (7) ways to meet developmental needs of children served; (8) the procedure of planning the daily schedule; (9) behavior management; (10) staff qualifications, selection, and training; (11) family day care for school-age children; and (12) budget development. (RH)

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THE ABC'S OF STARTING SCHOOL-AGE CHILD CARE

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SCHOOL-AGE CHILD CARE SERIES ADMINISTRATIVE FACT SHEETS

WISCONSIN CHILD CARE IMPROVEMENT PROJECT

THE ABC'S OF STARTING SCHOOL-AGE CHILD CARE

A. ASSESSING COMMUNITY NEEDS

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—by Rhea Strupp

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—by Jeanne Vergeront

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—by Jill Ellen Steinberg

FACT SHEET #7: Meeting the Developmental Needs of School-Age Children in Child Care
—by Jill Ellen Steinberg

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—by Vicki Herman

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—by Jill Ellen Steinberg

C. *CONSIDERATIONS FOR PERSONNEL*

FACT SHEET #10: School-Age Child Care Staff Qualifications, Selection and Training
—by Vicki Herman

FACT SHEET #11: Caring for School-Age Children in Family Day Care
—by Rhea Strupp

The Fact Sheets in this Series were edited by Diane Adams, Community Coordinated Child Care (4-C) in Dane County, one of the consortium members for the Wisconsin Child Care Improvement Project.

Wisconsin Child Care Improvement Project

#1 THE SCHOOL AGE CHILD CARE PLANNING PROCESS: A COMMUNITY EFFORT

In order to help working families make good choices for their children, communities need to have available a range of services for school-age children. These services may need to be available before school or after school, all day when schools are closed for conventions or vacations, around the hours of the shorter public school kindergarten day, and/or all day during the summer. The types of services should include supervised child care programs for younger school-age children as well as a variety of recreational activities and/or services that support children in self care for older school-age children.

HOW IT ALL STARTS

The beginning of the school-age child care planning process may be hard to pinpoint. A parent can't find care for a school-age child and is not willing to have her child go home alone; a librarian is concerned about the number of children who come to the library after school and stay until 5:00 p.m.; the local day care director cannot accommodate the school-age children parents want to enroll; or the school principal and teachers are worried about the number of kids who hang around the building after school. These are some of the kinds of issues that motivate community members to want to look more carefully at what happens to school-age children when school is not in session.

These individuals may find others who share their feelings. Together they may take their concerns to a PTA meeting or a church group to seek the support of others. Sometimes an organization will see the issue as one that fits into their goals and seek to do something about it. Other times it may be necessary to create a separate group to study the issue. Thus, an action group is formed.

THE ACTION/PLANNING GROUP

The key to success for an action group (that will have planning responsibilities) is that it have broad community representation and support. For this reason it is difficult for any one group—parents, school administrators, day care providers—to organize new school-age child care services alone. Among the people in every community who share a concern for the well-being of school-age children are:

- parents who cannot find care or who are at home and seeing children in the neighborhood unsupervised
- churches and church groups
- agencies serving youth, such as Y's, Scouts, or 4-H clubs
- school administrators, boards, teachers
- owners or managers of businesses where children hang out after school or where parents are employed
- day care center staff or family day care providers
- groups such as Lions, Kiwanis, and Homemakers' clubs

Of course, not all of these people will want to be or need to be members of the action group or planning committee. But, the committee should include some representation from many groups, as well as representatives from different social and ethnic backgrounds. Ideally, the committee membership will also include one or two community persons who can "make things happen."

WHAT DOES THE PLANNING COMMITTEE DO?

To keep members involved and interested, the committee must develop a clear plan of action, which defines the steps that need to be taken and the time needed to accomplish each step. If a committee fails, it is often because the group set out to accomplish a specific task, such as start an after-school day care center, without determining if it was needed or would be used.

There are several steps that the committee can take to develop a useful and effective plan for meeting the school-age child care needs of the community.

STEP 1. Gather information.

While those who have become members of the action group may all agree that there is a need for school-age child care, it is important to document the needs and to define them more specifically. For example, in one community the greatest need may be before school because of the school schedule, while in another it may be on Monday afternoons because of an early release time. In another community there may be space for a school-age program in a day care center but transportation problems keep families from using it.

Some of the information can be gathered informally, while other questions will need to use more formal methods of inquiry. Another Fact Sheet in this series, 'Assessing the Need for School-Age Care,' describes several methods to measure the needs of service and identifies the advantages and disadvantages of each.

STEP 2. Develop a plan

The next step for the planning committee is to put together an overall picture of what is needed by families and children and of what currently exists in the community. Combining these two pieces of information will help to define areas of need and possible solutions. The following solutions may be part of a community's plan:

- Seek some modification in existing programs so that they will better serve the needs of school-age children and/or their families;
- provide information about existing programs to parents so the programs can be better utilized;
- develop a way to transport children from the school to existing child care programs or homes;
- create a new school-age program;
- develop all-day programs for school convention and vacation days, or summertime;
- recruit family day care providers to care for this age group.

The planning committee may find a number of gaps between needs and services and have several possible services to be considered. Since success will depend upon being able to focus the members' energy and the community's interest on one or two specific tasks, this group must decide on its priorities.

In developing the plan, action committee members must make a number of decisions about the program/services that they identify as their priorities. If a school-age program is part of the plan, the committee should consider the following decision points:

Legal Structure: Is there an organization that can take on the program or does a new organization need to be created? If an existing organization is selected, are the goals and philosophy compatible? What difference will it make if the organization is for profit or nonprofit?

Expertise: If a school-age program is deemed a priority, the planners need to assure that a certain expertise in planning for this age group is part of the proposed program. Do the operators know how to plan for this age group well? Is there clear understanding of the developmental needs and program possibilities for school-age children?

Insurance: Liability insurance coverage has become a major problem for many agencies. Transporting children from one location to another may increase the liability costs. If transportion is a priority, can insurance coverage be obtained? If the program becomes a part of an existing agency, what will be the effect on their liability insurance costs?

Location: The location of the program in relation to the schools is extremely important. Space in school buildings or nearby can increase children's safety and eliminate expensive transportation costs. Is the location also convenient for parents, especially those who must use public transportation or car pools? Does the space provide for the different types of activities that children need? For how many years will this space be available?

Licensing: If the program serves children under the age of seven, it will need to be licensed by the Wisconsin Division of Community Services. Do plans ensure that the program and staffing will meet the licensing requirements? Can the space selected be licensed?

Funding: How will the service be financed? If parent fees are the financial base for the program, are they realistic for the community? Will enough parents be willing to pay the fees? Will there be financial assistance for fees for low-income families? Can start-up funds be obtained to help with the high cost of starting a program? If ongoing funding is needed, what are realistic sources?

STEP 3. Gain support for the plan

Not everyone in the community will agree with the action committee's plan. The objections of some may be due to a lack of information or misunderstandings, while others may object because of differing values. Some objections can be overcome, others cannot. Try to understand the concerns people have and provide information that will help eliminate any misconceptions.

Use any needs assessment efforts and findings as well as the action committee activities to educate the community. If action committee members represent different groups in the community, they should share information with their respective groups.

Whether or not the program location is to be in a school building, one of the most important relationships to develop is with the school administration and the school board. Talk with both administrators and board members early. If possible, include them on the planning committee. Always keep them informed and seek their ideas and suggestions.

Because schools are asked to provide more and more services, often without additional funds, school officials may be very cautious about requests from community groups. Be clear about your request and potential costs to the school. Allow plenty of time for some discussion of the issues and development of policies that might be needed.

Other important relationships to develop are with the other individuals and agencies that serve school-age children after school. The music teacher, 4-H or scout leaders, or dance instructors can be strong supporters of the action committee's plans or they can present strong opposition—depending upon how well they have been included in the planning. Their services may also be providing 'care' for many school age children.

CONCLUSION

A planning process that carefully considers each of the steps—gathering information, developing a plan, and gaining support for the plan—will be likely to see success in the development of a school-age child care plan in a community.

RESOURCES

Baden, R., Genser, L., Levine, J. & Seligson, M. SCHOOL-AGE CHILD CARE: AN ACTION MANUAL. Boston: Auburn House Publishing Co., 1982.

Hendon, K., Grace, J., Adams, D. & Strupp, A. THE AFTER SCHOOL DAY CARE HANDBOOK: HOW TO START AN AFTER SCHOOL PROGRAM FOR SCHOOL-AGE CHILDREN. Madison, WI: Community Coordinated Child Care, 1977.

FACT SHEET #1. Prepared by Rhea Strupp, School-Age Child Care Specialist, City of Madison Day Care Program, 210 Martin Luther King Blvd., Madison, WI 53710.

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SCHOOL-AGE CHILD CARE SERIES

Wisconsin Child Care Improvement Project

#2 ASSESSING THE NEED FOR SCHOOL-AGE CHILD CARE

This fact sheet will help you understand the purposes of a needs assessment for child care services for school-age children. It will introduce three different ways to find out what kinds of services may be needed in a community to meet the child care needs of children and families, and the advantages and disadvantages of each method.

WHAT IS A NEEDS ASSESSMENT?

A needs assessment is a planning process designed to answer three questions:

(1) To what extent is there a need for a service?
(2) What resources currently exist to meet those needs?
(3) What are the gaps between services needed and existing programs?

STEPS IN THE NEEDS ASSESSMENT PROCESS

The unmet needs for school-age child care can be brought to public attention by a variety of groups and individuals. Parents, the police, day care directors, and school social workers may be among those who first articulate the needs of young elementary school children for care before and after school. Together they may form a planning (action) group willing to document the needs for action by a larger community. The following are essential steps in the needs assessment process:

1. **Recognize the need.** Someone in the community, or perhaps a group of people, understands that there is an unmet need for a particular service.
2. **Establish a work group.** Information on forming such a planning or work group is found in Fact Sheet #1 in this series.
3. **Examine existing resources.** Discover what the community already offers in the way of services for children this age. These resources which may include after-school sports, Brownies, Scouts, neighborhood drop-in centers, day care centers and homes.
4. **Decide on methods for assessing needs.**
5. **Conduct the needs assessment.**
6. **Analyze, summarize, and report the results.**

DOING THE NEEDS ASSESSMENT

There are a variety of ways to measure need for services. Below is a brief desciption of three different methods. You may find it helpful to include all three methods in your planning.

1. The Key Informant Approach:

Method: Through questionnaires, interviews, or structured meetings with people in the community "in a position to know," the planning group collects information concerning the services needed. For example, the committee may ask the question: "Based on your experience with elementary-school-age children and their families, what are the unmet, under-met, and well-met child care needs of children in kindergarten through fifth grade?" The committee then prepares a summary of the opinions and perspectives of the participants.

Advantages: This method is relatively economical, since the committee will be assessing a small sample from the community. A community meeting can create ties between various segments of the community that may be able to provide support for the programs. Finally, you will get a broader picture than if you only asked potential users of the service.

Disadvantages: Information that you gather will be biased by whom you include in the survey. Including a wide variety of agencies and people in the survey will make it more complete. Further, unless you include a large number of parents in the survey, information from potential consumers will be missing.

2. Social Indicators:

Method: The work group researches information available in public records. Data are often available through the school census, United States Census, or local planning councils. Information is often available on age, sex, race, income, and family patterns (single parent households, working parents, etc.).

Advantages: This is the least expensive approach, since the data already exist in the public domain. Data from a well-designed survey should be quite accurate.

Disadvantages: The usefulness of the data is only as great as its accuracy. A poorly designed survey will provide inaccurate results. Also, since the information was collected for another purpose, it may not fit your needs. For example, the age breakdown in a survey may lump together all children between the ages of six and eighteen whose parents work, when you are only interested in 5-12 year olds.

Finally, information becomes quickly dated. Given the significant changes in the structure of the American family, information collected for the 1980 census is of limited value as we approach 1990.

3. Population Surveys:

Method: The survey usually involves administering a questionnaire by mail, phone, or interview. The questionnaire may be sent to an entire group (for example, all parents of elementary-school children in a school or a community), or to a sample (for example, a random sample of everyone in the community, or a random sample of all of the parents with elementary school children.)

Advantages: A well-designed survey, with good questions and good sampling methods, can give a good overview of needs, attitudes, and patterns of use for a service. A well-designed survey will ask for information in a simple, easy-to-understand manner.

Disadvantages: A poorly designed survey is useless. You may end up with information that is inaccurate or confusing, which could lead you to make poor decisions. A thorough distribution of the questionnaire can be costly. Mailed questionnaires tend to be somewhat more effective than other methods, but this approach is costly, especially if you provide postage for return of the questionnaire (the best way to get the highest response rate). Methods used to reduce the cost (sending questionnaires home, leaving questionnaires in grocery stores) may lead to a sample that isn't representative of the community.

A few pointers: Because questionnaires are frequently used, we offer a few pointers to make the information reliable:

• Keep the questionnaire brief and to the point. Resist the urge to ask everything you've ever wanted to know about school-age children.

• Test the survey before you mail it out. Have a few people fill out the survey. Revise the survey based on their comments and reactions. Did they understand the questions as you intended? Do their answers make sense to you? Will you be able to easily tabulate and summarize the results?

• Avoid ambiguous, open-ended questions. If you have a specific program in mind, describe that program and ask questions based on the need for that program. For example, the questions, "Would you be likely to use the child care program we have described?" would give you better information than 'Do you need child care?' The question: "We estimate that the program we are planning would cost $25 a week. Would you use the program at that cost?" is better than "How much could you afford to pay?"

• Make sure you have figured the cost (in both time and money) of analysis—and do not fail to report the results to the community.

REPORTING THE RESULTS

The final report of the needs assessment should contain at least the following pieces of information:

A description of the methods used to gather the information: What questions were asked? To whom was the questionnaire distributed? How many questionnaires were sent out? How many people returned the surveys? It is recommended that you attach a copy of the questionnaire to your report.

A summary of the results: The easiest way to do this is to report the numbers and percentages of people responding to each question.

Your analysis of the meaning of the results: What can you conclude from the answers that you received?

WHAT A NEEDS ASSESSMENT WON'T (AND WILL) TELL YOU

While it is a useful planning tool, the needs assessment will not tell you:

1. Whether people who need the service will use it
2. Whether you should have a specific kind of program, and whether a particular program will be financially successful
3. What kind of program is "best"

A well-designed needs assessment process can build community commitment to a service, and provide information about the gap between 'what is' and 'what ought to be.' When combined with other information, it will help you decide whether to continue to explore the need for school-age child care services. A thorough planning process will raise community awareness concerning this very important issue. Other elements of the planning process are dealt with more thoroughly in Fact Sheet #1 entitled "School-Age Child Care Planning Process: A Community Effort." See Exhibit A which follows for a sample needs survey.

RESOURCES

Baden, R., Genser, L., Levine, J. & Seligson, M. SCHOOL-AGE CHILD CARE: AN ACTION MANUAL. Boston: Auburn House Publishing Co., 1982.

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New York State Council on Children and Families, SCHOOL-AGE CHILD CARE TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE PAPER. Mayor Erastus Corning Tower, 28th Floor, Empire State Plaza, Albany, NY 12223.

FACT SHEET #2. Prepared by Lorna Aaronson, Day Care Specialist, City of Madison Day Care Program, 210 Martin Luther King Blvd., Madison, WI 53710.

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EXHIBIT A

SCHOOL-AGE CARE
K-6 PARENTS SURVEY

The Community Education Advisory Council and other interested persons have discussed the possibility of providing extended day child care services on a regular basis for children in grades K-6 each day that school is in session. The program would be open 6:30 a.m.-8:45 a.m. and 2:45 p.m.-6:00 p.m. on school days, Monday through Friday, with a fee payable for each session. (The program will need to be self-supporting.) A certified instructor would supervise the children and provide planned activities such as field trips, science experiments, dramatic play, arts and crafts, sports, music, cooking experiences, film, photography, computer usage and other activities. This program would be held at one of the local elementary schools. The probable starting date would be _____.

At this point in the planning process we need to know if you, as a parent, would consider using this program if it was made available:

---

1. What school does your child/children attend? _____

2. Would you send your child/children to such a supervised school-age child care program?

   _____ Yes _____ No _____ Maybe

3. For every child that you could send to a school-age child care program, check the grade(s).

   _____ K _____ 1 _____ 2 _____ 3 _____ 4 _____ 5 _____ 6

4. When would child care be needed? (Please list time needed, circle days)

   Before school _____ M T W TH F

   After school _____ M T W TH F

   Other times _____ M T W TH F

5. Would you be willing to pay approximately $3.00 for each session or approximately $5.00 per day for both? (Reduced fees available for additional family members.)

Please give your name and address so that we might send you more information as it becomes available.

Name _____ Phone _____

Address _____

Please return this survey in the self-addressed stamped envelope by: _____

Any questions, comments or suggestions may be directed to:

THANK YOU!

Wisconsin Child Care Improvement Project

#3 ESTABLISHING COOPERATIVE RELATIONSHIPS WITH SCHOOLS

With the increased need for school-age child care, coupled with the availability of space in many communities to house these programs in the schools, school-based child care programs will continue to increase in numbers over the next several years. Preschool child care programs have been trying to address the school-age child care need for years. However, transportation to and from the child's school to organized preschool child care programs has always been a great obstacle. Besides the transportation dilemma, preschool programs also face their own space limitations and often put the school-age child in the same groupings with preschoolers. This arrangement makes the situation unsuitable for all.

A major goal then is to offer a program which specializes in the developmental needs of the five- to ten-year-old population, and house the school-age program in an appropriate space. Schools appear to be the obvious location for such programs. The communication between the school-age child care program and the school administration become critical in implementing and continuing school-based child care programs.

ESTABLISHING A COOPERATIVE RELATIONSHIP

The planning group will have determined the need for this service, what families are currently using for care, and what other child care options are available. The need for school-age child care must be established through a needs survey (see Fact Sheet #2 on needs assessment). But once the need is established, the planning group will need to articulate the program's goals and objectives in an effective manner.

Among those to be communicated with in setting up a school-based program will be the superintendent, school board members, and the principal. Each of these people or groups of people will have a different set of questions pertaining to how this program will affect them. Let's take each one and discuss the role that group or individual plays in the establishment of a new school-age program, and some of the questions that may be asked.

1. THE SCHOOL SUPERINTENDENT:

The superintendent will want to know answers to questions such as:

"What will the school district responsibilities be? What will the school-age program's responsibilities be regarding such matters as insurance, staffing, cost to parents, cost to district, hours of operation?"

"How are you incorporated?"

"How many children will be served?"

"What type of space are you requesting?"

"Will you supply furniture and supplies?"

"What added responsibilities will the district staff have, primarily the custodian, school secretary, and principal?"

"Do you have a description of your program?"

It's obviously going to take time to get the answers to these questions, but being prepared for the superintendent is a major key in getting your program started. The superintendent often makes recommendations to the school board and helps convince, if need be, a principal who is concerned with how the program may add responsibility to is or her job description.

2. SCHOOL BOARD MEMBERS:

Members of the school board may know there is a need but want to make sure that any additional costs incurred as a result of this program are paid for by the agency and not the district. Examples of such costs are custodial, utilities, staffing, added transportation, etc. Basically, they may feel that taxpayers shouldn't have to bear any additional cost that this program will generate. (Some school boards, on the other hand, are quite willing to pay some share of the costs—such as offering little or no rent to the school-age program.) Many school districts would prefer to contract with an outside agency rather than making this a school district service, and thus becoming an additional expense to the district.

3. THE SCHOOL PRINCIPAL:

The principal needs to be assured that this program will run smoothly on its own and all of the procedures of operating the program, from giving information to parents to collecting fees, will be taken care of by your agency. The principal may be a little worried at first about a program that operates outside of school hours and one that is outside the school's authority. Consequently, a line of communication directly between your agency and the principal is essential. Find out what the school's rules and policies are regarding both building use and playground space so that your program is in harmony with the school's rules.

The school's secretary and custodians, like the principal, want to make sure that the program is well-supervised and self-sustaining. Work with the school staff toward being treated like any other classroom in the school. Often, this school-age child care program can become isolated from the rest of the school. Communication with all school staff by the School-Age Program helps avoid isolation. After all, your agency and the school are both serving the school children of that district.

Often, school-age child care program contracts with school districts are renewable on an annual basis. In addition to the usual goal of offering an excellent program for the children, while meeting the needs of their parents, the school-age program must work in a communicative and cooperative way with all the staff of the school district. Take time to be thorough in your planning. As you can see, there is a lot to know even before you meet with the first person. It is best to plan so that the program starts in September because parents of school-age children make plans for child care on a school year to school year basis.

Finally, when you renew your contract with the school board be sure to inform them of the number of children you served in the year past and information about your program. School board personnel change often so new members may not know what your agency does. Maintain copoerative relationships with school personnel by sending "thank you" pictures from the children, or flowers at appropriate times during the year.

Some problems in this cooperative relationship may inevitably arise: there may be no telephone in the school space you have been assigned, or the school carnival "takes over" the gym you have reserved. Snow days and other emergencies can create major upheavals in the working relationship you have established. While nothing can prevent occasional conflicts, "working at" the ongoing relationship with school personnel is the best antidote for what otherwise might be the outright dismissal of your program from the building and the district.

RESOURCES

Baden, R., Genser, L., Levine, J. & Seligson, M. SCHOOL-AGE CHILD CARE: AN ACTION MANUAL. Boston: Auburn House Publishing Co., 1982.

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New York State Council on Children and Families, SCHOOL-AGE CHILD CARE TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE PAPER. Mayor Erastus Corning Tower, 28th Floor, Empire State Plaza, Albany , NY 12223.

FACT SHEET #3. Prepared by Michael Conway, Family After-School Child Care, 2717 East Hampshire St., Milwaukee, WI 53211.

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#4 CONSIDERATIONS FOR SELECTING SCHOOL SPACE FOR SCHOOL-AGE PROGRAMS

Schools are often desirable locations for school-age programs because children can safely move from the classroom setting to the program whenever their school day ends. Since schools are usually located in the child's neighborhood, it is also convenient for parents at the end of the day.

When a program is located in a school building, it is necessary to carefully define the space the program will need before you talk with school officials. Regular classrooms used by the school are often not desirable for a school-age program because there is little open space for creating activity areas and because classroom teachers may need to be in the classrooms after school to organize materials or grade papers.

Listed below are some of the space needs for a school-age program in a school building:

HOME BASE AREA

A school-age program needs a specified area/room to which it can have access during program hours and extending to 15 minutes before and after. This area needs to be large enough to meet state day care licensing requirements (35 square feet per child). An average classroom 24x30' can accommodate 21 children. Some examples of types of rooms that have been used successfully include all-purpose rooms, art and music rooms, gymnasiums, kindergarten or special education rooms, or unused classrooms.

It is desirable for the home-based area to be:

- accessible to bathrooms and water
- accessible to a refrigerator or cooler
- near an entrance that children and parents can use without needing to walk through the building

BACK-UP AREAS

A school-age program can benefit from access to other spaces in the building in order to increase the variety of activities. While these spaces are often needed for an hour or less during the program day, they are important for the development of a quality program.

Commonly requested back-up areas include:

- access to the gym on a daily basis or, at least, on a regular schedule for indoor large motor activities, especially in the winter months
- access to a kitchen area for cooking activities
- access to an Instructional Materials Center or other carpeted area for quiet reading times or viewing films

STORAGE AREAS

A school-age program needs space to store its materials and equipment during the school day. Some workable examples would include a closet or one or more metal cabinets and/or additional floor space.

It is desirable for the storage areas to be:

- in or near the home-base area
- secure and/or not regularly used by others

OUTDOOR PLAY AREAS

A school-age program needs to provide opportunity for outdoor activities. It is desirable for the outdoor play area to be:

- easily accessible to the home-base area
- well-defined, if other groups are also using the outdoor space
- equipped with play structures

OTHER FACTORS TO CONSIDER

- Access to a telephone for the program. Because phone calls tend to increase the workload of the school secretary, the program may need to have its own phone line installed in the home room.
- Providing advanced notice to teachers, custodians, secretary and parents that the program will be in the school.
- A method to provide for regular communication between school staff and program staff.
- Consideration of how the program's schedule and the scheduling of other school events and the maintenance and cleaning of the building will be accomplished.

FACT SHEET #4. Adapted from materials prepared by Jeanne Vergeront for the City of Madison Day Care Program, School-Age Child Care Project.

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#5 CREATING ENVIRONMENTS FOR SCHOOL-AGE CHILD CARE

The space around us effects the way we feel and what we feel like doing. An open field or an open gym usually make us feel like moving or running, while a cool, quiet area may draw us to sit down and relax. The environment and the arrangement of furnishings or equipment in the space give us messages about what we should do or should not do. It can say "come in" or "stay away" or it can direct us to walk through the space a certain way. Sometimes the environment can also give messages that were not intended, such as "run here!"

The environment for a child care program is extremely important. The arrangement of a room and the outdoor space will influence children's behavior. If it is well-organized, the environment can promote constructive use of materials and positive interactions between children. If the arrangement of the environment has not been given careful thought, there may be conflicting uses which disrupt children's activities and cause disputes over space and materials.

MESSAGES FROM THE ENVIRONMENT

Think, for a moment, about the types of environments you seek out for your different moods or activities. For example, what type of environment do you want when you come home from work? Perhaps a soft sofa for resting or a quiet area where you can unwind comes to mind. What type of environment best suits you when you have a pie to make or a paper to write? Many will say: "One that is organized to fit the task, has good light, and has all the needed materials and equipment at your fingertips." If you're feeling lonely or want to think through a problem, you'll probably want a quiet space that is protected from interruptions by others. And when you want lunch and a private visit with a special friend, a table for two is more desirable than a table for six.

DIFFERENT TYPES OF ENVIRONMENTS WITHIN THE PROGRAM SPACE

Children also need different environments to accommodate their different moods and activities before and after school. The following types of space within a school-age child care program create different feelings and attitudes:

1. Inviting space—makes children feel like they belong.

A welcome sign, a special place for belongings and a sign-in sheet all convey the feeling to children that they are expected. A bulletin board which displays some of their art work or a banner that children have made can also give the sense that this space is theirs—at least during the program hours.

2. Soft space—lets children relax and be comfortable.

Every room needs soft spots, some for one or two children, some for small groups, and possibly one large area where everyone can gather. Rug pieces of various sizes can create soft areas, as can bean bag chairs, pillows and cushions.

3. Private space—permits children to be alone or with one or two friends.

Some spaces clearly indicate that only one or two children can be there—a box with pillows, a small table with two chairs, a bean bag chair. Other private spaces can be created with blankets over tables, real or child-created tents. Frequently private spaces are also soft spaces. But a private space could also be a table in a protected area for homework.

4. Work space—supports children's involvement in activities.

Tables make good work areas for many different activities such as cooking projects, crafts and art. Rugs or carpeted areas also create work spaces, especially for board games and construction materials like Legos or Lincoln Logs. Open spaces, such as playgrounds or gyms, are needed for physical activities and development of large motor skills. Nature activities may require outdoor areas.

Work areas need to be available in different sizes. Some areas may accommodate only one or two children at a time while others may be suited to groups of six or eight.

5. Storage units—encourage children to be independent, to assume responsibility and to carry out their own ideas.

When materials are organized so that they are accessible, children can take more responsibility for their own activities and cleanup. Portable storage units permit children to help set up and put away the program when it is located in shared space. Crates, plastic bins, and carts on wheels are useful in making the space more accessible for children.

6. Community space—extends beyond the walls and fences, involves children with the larger community.

School-age programs need to regularly extend their environment into the community. This can be accomplished by making use of community resources, such as libraries, museums, businesses, parks, nature areas, or nursing homes.

PUT IT ALL TOGETHER: CREATE A FLOOR PLAN

Once the types of space to be included in the program are determined, the next step is to organize them in a floor plan. Where will the soft environment be? How many work areas will be included? Which spaces should be next to each other, and which should be far apart? Look at your floor plan and see the following factors have been given consideration in planning your environment:

Traffic: How will people move around the room? Will traffic cut across a work area? If so, could a storage unit or partition be placed to direct traffic around the area? Are there wide open spaces that invite children to run rather than walk?

Storage: Some storage of materials is needed in every area. Identify the storage space in each area. Crates can hold books or games and stacking units can hold the art supplies.

Levels of activity: The amount of activity in a space will vary; art activities may be quiet while block building and dramatic play tend to be more active. Are quiet activities away from the active play areas and the quiet areas?

Noise levels: Active play will be noisier than most quiet play, so the planning for activity levels will also help control the noise levels. Some quiet activities, such as listening to records or tapes, will produce some distractions, too. Have the activities that tend to be noisy been separated from the quiet areas?

Light: Will there be adequate light in the areas used for drawing, games and reading? Will private and soft spaces have dim light or a blanket to block out the light?

Don't waste time looking for the ideal or "perfect" environment for your program! Good environments come about through a careful, thoughtful planning process that creates spaces suited to children's interests and needs. Since interests and needs change, so must environments change as the year and the seasons progress.

Involve the children in planning the space. Ask them what types of space they would like. When you see a problem with the way the environment is organized, share what you are seeing with the children and have them think about possible solutions.

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FACT SHEET #5. Prepared by Rhea Strupp, School-Age Child Care Specialist, City of Madison Day Care Program, 210 Martin Luther King Blvd., Madison, WI 53710.

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#6 DESIGNING A SCHOOL-AGE CHILD CARE PROGRAM

School-age child care is one of the fastest growing segments of the child care community. Programs are being developed throughout the United States by community groups, schools, Y's, preschool day care centers, community groups, schools, and family day care providers. It is important to note that while the service can be successfully provided by individuals and groups with diverse backgrounds, high quality programs will have certain characteristics in common. Above all, they will each recognize the developmental characteristics of school-age children and the role that school-age child care plays along with other parts of a child's life.

RECREATIONAL FOCUS

The time between 3 and 6 p.m. represents approximately 20% of a young school-age child's waking hours. After being "on the job" for six or seven hours in a strongly academic, teacher-directed environment, the school-age child needs a chance at recreational activity, in the company of friends. School-agers in child care need to unwind, relax, be themselves, and have a good time. This doesn't mean the program shouldn't have structure; it means simply that the program's structure should allow for plenty of choice, and have a relaxed pace.

PHYSICAL SET-UP

School-age child care programs can be successful in a variety of physical spaces. Many programs use shared elementary school space (gyms, cafeterias, art rooms, etc.) and are completely portable. Others have permanent space. Thinking through the use of whatever space is available is an important step to planning a program. Remember that how the environment is set up tells the children what to do in that space. For example, children entering a wide open room will tend to run, while children entering a room with a check-in table in front of the door will stop and focus. Having materials such as games and art supplies directly accessible to children without going through an adult encourages children to be self-directed. Portable art-carts for supplies, with child-level shelves, are a nice solution where programs don't have exclusive use of the space or preschoolers and school-agers need distinct supply areas within the same room. Many programs set up activity areas to stimulate a child's interest to explore: arts and crafts area, small manipulatives area, quiet area, construction area, science area, etc. Art carts, cafeteria tables, rugs, and tri-wall dividers can set areas apart. School-aged children can and should take responsibility for setting up and cleaning up the activities in which they engage.

THE NEED FOR PRIVACY

From time to time, most children feel the need to escape the public view, or to find a place to play with one or two special friends. Privacy may be very hard to achieve with 30 other children in the same room, yet it is important in a school-age child care environment. The constant demand of having to react to other human beings is stressful for children. Small cubbies, free-standing tents, tri-wall "houses," appliance boxes, and blankets over cafeteria tables are some of the creative ways staff and children have met the need for privacy.

ROUTINES

A predictable routine is the backbone of your program. Knowing what to expect empowers children to make decisions about what they want to do. (Where a program has no predictability, children must rely on the staff to tell them what is going to happen, which leaves them feeling powerless and uncomfortable.) Setting a daily pattern for such things as check-in, choice time, handwashing, snack, special project time, gym or outside time, and clean-up is very helpful and satisfying to children. Setting a weekly or monthly pattern for special activities such as movies, swimming, or field trips also makes a program run more smoothly. Parents will also appreciate seeing in advance when these events are planned.

ACTIVITIES

Many different activities are possible in a school-age child care program, particularly where children are present for more than an hour at a time. Most successful programs provide a balance of **free choice activity** (in which materials are easily accessible to children, who decide what they are going to do and with whom) and **teacher-planned activity** in which the staff present new things for children to try. Even with planned activities, though, non-participation is usually an alternative in most programs. Many programs will offer each new project (such as weaving, macrame, candle-making, etc.) over a period of a week or so, letting children plan if and when they will join in. Remember, school-age children enjoy projects that provide opportunities for them to see their successes, and enjoy using real tools and materials.

CARING AND RESPONSIBILITY

The school-ager typically enjoys taking responsibility. It is very appropriate to expect children to check in when they arrive, put their coats and belongings in the assigned places, find something to do, take turns helping with center responsibilities (animal care, setting up snack, checking the bathrooms at the end of the day, bringing in the playground equipment, etc.), cleaning up their own messes, and checking out with a staff member when they leave.

CONTACT WITH ADULTS

The school-age child care program offers an excellent opportunity for spontaneous, supportive conversation between adults and children. Caregivers need to take enough time to join in activities, sit with and listen to children, and know what questions to ask that encourage children to share their thoughts and feelings. Caregivers are important role models for children.

PLANNING TIME

While many of the activities that children choose in a day may be spontaneous, much planning needs to take place to allow for spontaneity. Set aside a specific time, outside program time, for the staff to meet and plan. This should be in addition to a few minutes each day for set-up and wrap-up time without activity opportunities. They also need to plan daily events (how long the group stays at the park), transitions (where children go after snack, where they are to wait before going outside), getting materials (who will collect milk cartons for the model city), and routine tasks (who will supervise check-in or snack time, etc.). These meeting times are also good times to "trouble shoot" and evaluate your program.

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FACT SHEET #6. Prepared by Jill Ellen Steinberg, The After-School Day Care Association. 3200 Monroe Street, Madison, WI 53711.

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#7 MEETING THE DEVELOPMENTAL NEEDS OF SCHOOL-AGE CHILDREN IN CHILD CARE

A high-quality school-aged child care program takes into consideration the developmental needs of children during the elementary school years. It also understands the very unique role that school-age child care plays in a child's life. Just as adults pursue leisure-time activities to extend their personalities outside the workplace, children need positive social and recreational experiences that supplement and complement their school day. 5- to 10-year-olds are moving rapidly toward independence, and are exploring how much they can do on their own. A good school-age child care program can provide an excellent opportunity for individual growth, while also reassuring parents that their children are in a safe, supervised environment.

WHAT ARE SCHOOL-AGED CHILDREN LIKE?

Children vary in temperament, as well as in their rate of development. Add to this the special challenge that school-age child care programs may care for a wide range of children all under one roof, and that children's moods may vary from day to day. Kindergarteners, 7-year-olds, and 11-year-olds can have very different interests and approaches to play.

Kindergarteners still resemble preschoolers in many respects; they tend to like doing things "for the fun of it." The amount of fantasy play children engage in seems to peak between the ages of 4 and 6, with children concentrating on more real-life pursuits after this time. The kindergarten child is less likely to be interested in an end product or in winning the game than the older school-ager, and he or she may have little regard for rules.

Between the ages of about 7 to 10, children pass through a period that Piaget termed "concrete operations." The school-age child is interested in reality, and has a need for structure, order, and for rules. While the preschooler might enjoy the pretend kitchen, for example, the school-ager wants to use the real appliances, and do real work. Structure and rules give the school-ager a sense of security. Sometimes, though, school-agers get bound up by rules. They can't see that there is more than one way to do something, or that rules can bend. "It's not fair!" is a common cry. The school-ager may see the world in absolutes, right or wrong, with no middle ground.

School-agers are generally very industrious, social people. They gain self-esteem through achievement, and tend to measure their self-worth in simple terms such as "Is what I did good?" and "Am I somebody's friend?" Children this age are concerned with hands-on experiences, completing tasks, creating products, and developing physical and intellectual competencies. They will typically spend long periods of time at activities such as art projects, organizing games, and nearly anything else at which they see themselves as competent. They will tend to avoid the things they fear they might fail, and sometimes need encouragement to try something new. School-agers will generally separate by sex when choosing playmates.

Older elementary-aged children may resist being in a structured environment after school. This is related more to naturally emerging independence than to the program's content. Older children will generally be happier in a program if they sense that they are trusted and if they are free to choose what they do, have a say in planning trips and activities, and have plenty of time to socialize with friends with minimal adult intervention. Older school-agers are beginning to develop good reasoning ability, and often start becoming interested in social issues and causes. Some older children enjoy being program helpers; others prefer not to be involved with younger children but to pursue projects on their own.

HOW CAN YOU MEET THE NEEDS OF SCHOOL-AGERS IN CHILD CARE?

Regardless of the setting (group, family day care, etc.) these are some things that can be done to create a healthy emotional climate for school-agers:

- Be aware of children's need to be accepted by peers
- As a child gets older, the teacher's approval becomes much less important than that of the other children.
- Recognize that school-agers are curious, and offer positive ways to use their curiosity.
- Recognize and work **with** their sense of fair play, and their need to structure their world with rules.
- Make your school-age care environment one in which it is safe to share feelings.
- Create a relaxed, open, playful mood in which there are few things that must be completed, but where responsibilities (such as clean-up) are clearly defined.

- Stress the positive things that you see in children. Offer activities that allow for visible success.
- Respect a child's need to spend time alone, or with friends, and not be 'programmed' every minute.

Above all, recognize that each child is different. Some children may need to release energy through physical activity after a sedentary school day. Others may be very tired, and want to do easy, unstressful things for a time. The successful school-age child care program will offer choices that meet these varying needs, will allow freedom and privacy, within a structure that is secure and predictable to children.

FACT SHEET #7. Prepared by Jill Ellen Steinberg, The After School Day Care Association, 3200 Monroe St., Madison, WI 53711.

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#8 PLANNING THE DAILY SCHEDULE: RULES AND ROUTINES

It is important that school-age children experience the child care program as a place to play, to create, and to socialize. The program should not feel like an extension of the classroom but rather like their "other place" between school and home. The majority of school classroom experiences involve teacher-directed activities. The children make few choices of their own. However, in successful school-age child care programs the daily schedule offers a wide variety of choices for each child to make. Because of the many available choices, rules and routines are essential to maintain security and enjoyment for each child.

RULES

Rules do many things in the school-age child care program. They give support to the established routine. They inform children and staff of procedures to follow and how to best use the environment and materials. They make the day care room a place where everyone is respected and safe. Most importantly, rules provide the limits and guidelines school-age children need in order to feel secure, while learning to interact with others and the world around them.

Rules are successfully followed if they are explained and enforced right from the onset of a program or a new child's attendance. Explain the rules in the beginning of the fall and summer programs. Review them again during winter and spring break. Go over the rules with the children throughout the year. Always evaluate the rules to determine if changes need to be made. If changes are necessary, involve the children in the process. Children will rebel and feel threatened if rules are changed too often and without their input.

While rules are important, it is equally important that the program not be overburdened with too many rules. With too many rules it will be a place where the children will hear a lot of "no's" and "don't do that" instead of "yes" and "try it."

Rules used in school-aged child care programs should be:

- Worded positively
- Few in number
- Enforceable at all times by all of the staff
- Achievable at all times by all of the children

ROUTINES

Routines are the established schedule and sequence of activities occurring throughout the program day. Well-established routines create a comfortable, smoothly running program because everyone—staff and children alike—knows what is expected. Children are able to make choices within a consistent routine and predictable schedule; this not only helps their decision-making skills but also helps everyone feel comfortable. A successful routine has a variety of interesting activities available from which all the children can choose. Routines should include a time for snack, free environment, quiet time, gym or outdoor play, and planned, organized hands-on projects.

Snack may be served immediately after the children arrive. Children enjoy helping to make it and serve it. This may be a valuable time to talk quietly with individual children and let them unwind from their busy day.

Free environment is a time during the scheduled routine when the children can make a range of choices: playing with blocks and other manipulative puzzles, card games, board games such as Othello and Master Mind, or going to the learning center and/or art area.

Quiet time is a time for the children to relax and rest while reading, playing a quiet one-to-one game of cards, drawing in the art area, or working with quiet manipulatives such as Legos.

Gym and outdoor play should be organized around games or free play areas such as climbing equipment. Games should allow all children to participate and develop their play skills. Rules for this type of play need to be established and reviewed so that all children can play safely and successfully.

Planned projects should offer such hands-on experiences as art, cooking, science, crafts, drama or dance.

(SAMPLE)

SCHOOL-AGE CHILD CARE PROGRAM ROUTINE

Before School:

6:00 - 7:00 a.m.	Individually greet every child. Free Environment
7:00 - 7:45 a.m.	Free Environment with child-directed activities available at different centers (e.g. playdough, simple art project) or teacher-directed project in science, cooking, etc.
7:45 - 8:00 a.m.	Group Time
8:00 - 8:25 a.m.	Gym or outdoors
8:25 - 8:30 a.m.	Preparation for school departure

After School:

3:00 - 3:15 p.m.	Arrival from school, staff greet children as they enter
3:00 - 4:00 p.m.	Snack and Free Environment
4:00 - 4:30 p.m.	Gym or Outdoors
4:30 - 4:45 p.m.	Quiet Time
4:45 - 5:00 p.m.	Choice of Main Activity or Free Environment
5:00 - 5:30 p.m.	Gym or Outdoors
5:30 - 6:00 p.m.	Quiet Time/Clean Up/Departure

Rules and routines should accommodate the needs and variety of the children. When they are successfully established in a school-age child care program group management will be easier, and the children will have the freedom to grow and learn in the security of the program.

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FACT SHEET #8. Prepared by Vicki Herman, Family After-School Program, 2717 East Hampshire St., Milwaukee, WI 53211.

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#9 CHOICE AND RESPONSIBILITY IN SCHOOL-AGE CHILD CARE

Guiding the behavior of elementary-age children poses a special challenge for many child care providers. School-agers are moving out into a large world, entering a period of development in which their social circles are widening, their intellectual competencies are growing, and their desire for independence is increasing. As the child's school takes on a larger role in educating the child, the child care environment shifts to complement it, providing recreational and social opportunities. High-quality school-age child care gives children the opportunity to direct many of their own activities, and promotes individual responsibility.

WHY IS CHOICE IMPORTANT?

Learning to make sound choices is a skill that takes practice. If our goal is to raise children to become competent adults, we need to give children practice at making decisions on their own and feeling the consequences of the choices they make. Since a great deal of the child's school day is structured, the school-age child care environment becomes one of the main chances for the child to practice making real choices.

WHAT KINDS OF CHOICES CAN YOU PROVIDE SCHOOL-AGERS?

In a school-age child care program, there are many potential opportunities for choice. For example:

- When children first arrive, (after checking in and putting their school belongings in the appropriate place), they can go to the area, play board games, or go to the "special project table." Or, they can simply chat with friends.
- At snack time, children can make mini-pizzas and put on their own choice of topping.
- Part of the group can go outside, and part stay inside (if there are two or more adults); or, with only one adult, everyone can go out in the play area, but some children can bring quiet games or art materials, instead of participating in active games.
- If a special project for the day is offered, children may opt not to participate, providing they find something else acceptable to do.

HELPING TO PLAN

Elementary-age children often have strong feelings about what they like and what they don't like to do. Sometimes they resist participating in activities simply because they didn't have a say in designing them. It is important to view the school-age child care situation as an opportunity for children to practice planning their own recreational pursuits. With the teaching staff helping them see the possible options, children can plan long range projects such as designing and making a giant papier-mache sculpture, or putting together a newspaper. Regular group time meetings can be used to help involve children in planning.

PROMOTING RESPONSIBILITY

Most adults strive to take responsibility for their behavior. Sometimes our misbehavior results in unpleasant consequences. (If we choose to speed in our car, for instance, we may get caught and must pay a fine.) Children can learn this same concept at an early age.

Establish that taking care of program toys and equipment is the responsibility of those who use them.

Establish clear rules and enforce them consistently. Basic rules such as not hurting another person or their property are fundamental. Other specific rules for the room can be designed with input from the children. As problems come up, the group as a whole can discuss what new rules or changes in rules might help solve the problem at hand.

When a child is repeatedly breaking "a rule," discuss the child's behavior with him or her. Ask children to suggest what consequences might help them remember "the rule" that is involved. Decide on a consequence, and USE it if the misbehavior occurs again. If that consequence doesn't seem to be doing the trick, go back to the child and find something that will.

CONFLICT RESOLUTION

Most adults attempt to solve their disputes with minimum struggle. School-agers can, with a little encouragement, work out most of their disagreements. When arguments come up, rather than imposing your solution on them, encourage children to come up with their solution to the problem. Reinforce basic rules, such as "Hitting someone else is not a choice here. What else can you do?"

CAREGIVER BEHAVIOR

Your behavior toward children influences the choices they in turn make about their own behavior. Most children will feel insecure until they really know their "limits." They actually feel more comfortable in a situation with a clear structure. Therefore, they do a lot of testing initially to see what the **real** rules are. Caregivers must be careful to be consistent and gently remind children of the rules during this phase.

It is also particularly important for the school-age child care provider to avoid power struggles with children in their care. When you feel threatened, angry, or challenged by a child, this is a dead giveaway that the child is trying to engage you in a power struggle. Respond carefully and thoughtfully, rather than merely reacting. If you're not sure what to do, it's often better to explain to the child that you are so angry you aren't going to address his behavior right now, but that the two of you will talk later. When dealing with a child who tends towards power struggles, let the "room rules" guide the child's options. Let the child feel the real consequences of his or her actions, if possible.

Recognize that we all need reminders from time to time. Give children the encouragement that you know they can control their own behavior, and that you will be there to help.

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FACT SHEET #9. Prepared by Jill Ellen Steinberg, The After School Day Care Association, 3200 Monroe Street, Madison, WI 53711.

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#10 SCHOOL-AGE CHILD CARE STAFF QUALIFICATIONS, SELECTION AND TRAINING

The quality of a school-age child care program is dependent upon the quality of the staff working with the children. Promoting the quality of your program should always be in mind while selecting and training staff.

Before recruiting staff, have specific qualifications in mind. With the child care teacher shortage becoming more of a concern, first determine your highest expected qualifications for a staff person. This person would be able to work in a program without much guidance from a supervisor. Then, so as not to disqualify a person with potential, decide what your minimum acceptable qualifications will be. This minimally qualified person will have the traits of a person who works well with children but has only the minimum amount of experience and training. With more training or experience, this "minimally trained" person can become a qualified school-age child care worker. Hire with an individual's potential in mind so you don't eliminate those people who have a knack for working with school-age children.

Some qualities of successful school-age child care workers are:

- Knowledge of school-age development (physical, mental, and emotional);
- Training and experience in elementary education, recreation, or physical education (college or technical school courses);
- Patience, flexibility, understanding, acceptance and caring;
- Ability to work well with all types of people no matter what age or position (i.e.: children, parents, other staff, supervisors, and building personnel such as principals and custodians);
- A sense of humor;
- Dependability; along with
- Common sense!

When in the process of recruiting applicants it is important that you draw from all of the community resources available. Possibilities include job advertisements in placement centers of colleges and technical schools offering education training, word of mouth by current staff and parents, and church bulletins.

ORIENTATION

The initial training of a staff person lays the foundation for the future success of the worker's interaction with the children. Give a complete and thorough new staff orientation, and continue to enrich staff skills through ongoing monthly inservice training.

Orientation of new staff should include the following:

- Review of applicable parts of the **Licensing Rules for Group Day Care Centers** (Wisconsin HSS 55)
- Review of the center policies, including
  a. curriculum
  b. schedule of activities/routines and rules
  c. discipline
  d. health/first aid
  e. nutrition
- Plans and procedures for emergencies and evacuation, including:
  a. fire evacuation
  b. tornado evacuation
  c. medical emergencies and first aid
- Job descriptions and responsibilities
- Recognition of childhood illnesses
- Review of the child abuse and neglect laws

ONGOING TRAINING

Be sure to involve your staff in the process of identifying and designing inservice training. To determine what monthly inservice training to offer your staff, think about who needs the training: all staff? head teachers or assistant teachers? individuals who were hired because of potential but who need more experience and/or training? people with a particular interest in a specific topic you might offer?

After you have established who the training is for, evaluate what kind of training is needed. Here is a list of some possible inservice topic ideas:

- The physical, social, and mental development of children ages 5 to 10
- Steps in rule-making/problem-solving with children
- Environments
- Working with the difficult child in day care
- Routines
- Curriculum/Activity ideas
- Community field trips
- Resolving conflicts with school-age children
- Children in divorce
- Supervision for teachers

The final step in inservice planning is deciding the presentation method. Examples that can be used are presentations by guest speakers or someone on staff (such as the program director of other staff persons), articles and discussion groups, and observations of other after-school programs.

CONCLUSION

A well thought out training program will give the staff sufficient skills to be good child care workers and build the quality school-age day care program all children deserve. The staff will work well with the children, be prepared to deal with all events and emergencies, and be satisfied in their careers.

FACT SHEET #10. Prepared by Vicki Herman, Milwaukee Family After-School Program, 2717 East Hampshire St., Milwaukee, WI 53211.

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The Fact Sheets in this Series were edited by 4-C in Dane County

Wisconsin Child Care Improvement Project

#11 CARING FOR SCHOOL-AGE CHILDREN IN FAMILY DAY CARE

Family day care providers are often asked to offer care for school-age children. There are several factors to consider when deciding whether to do school-age child care, ranging from the licensing or certification rules for the numbers of children in care at one time to the space and activities needed by school-age children and your own interests.

CONSIDER THE CARE THAT PARENTS WILL NEED

The school setting involves children about 6 hours each day (or 2½ hours for a typical kindergarten child). Depending upon the hours of work and the school schedule, parents often need before and/or after school care. These needs for care may be easily combined with the care of younger children in a family day care home. Some of the younger children might arrive after the school-age children have gone to school or leave early in the afternoon before the older children arrive back after school.

Many parents will need full day care on teacher inservice or convention days, during school vacations and during the summer. Others may need care all morning or all afternoon if their child is in kindergarten. The full day care may be more difficult to provide without violating licensing rules. It is important to discuss these needs with parents. They may not remember to mention the times they need full day care even though they want it!

CONSIDER THE DEVELOPMENTAL NEEDS OF SCHOOL-AGE CHILDREN

School-age children are not just bigger preschool children. They are different in the way they think, the way they play, and the way they relate to other children and adults. Even the kindergarten child is different. As children start school, they become more independent, they can do more for themselves and, in the larger setting of a school building, children are expected to take increasing responsibility for their own needs and belongings. With increased independence often comes more assertiveness, more ideas of what to do and how to do it.

Not all school-age children are alike and certainly the 5-year-olds are different from the 10-year-olds. But there are some developmental characteristics and attributes that are common to most school-age children.

School-age children like to be with their friends and age-mates. Just being together, laughing and talking, becomes very important as children get older. They still need adults for support and guidance, but the ideas and expectations of their friends become increasingly more important.

Doing real things, like making a snack, sanding a table, or building with real tools, also becomes more important. Younger school-age children still like fantasy and dramatic play, but they also want real accessories for that play. The waitress needs a menu and a pad for taking orders when they play restaurant.

Playing games with friends consumes more and more time. While 5's and 6's still like to make up or change the rules of these games as they go along, older children become very rigid about the rules to games and about fairness. "That's not the way to play and game!" or "That's not fair!" are common comments. Rules help give their world order and a sense of security, so children are very concerned about the rules for everything. They also tend to see these rules as absolutes: everything is black or white and there are no shades of gray.

School-age children need to experience lots of success. They want to do well and use their knowledge and skills. They have a longer attention span, with increased involvement and desire to complete tasks. This also means that these children are less willing to stop in the middle of an activity or take apart a Lego structure they have just started to build. It is not uncommon for some of their activities to continue for several days.

These children do not want to be considered as "babies" or "little children." In fact, many school-age children do not want to go to the "baby sitter' because they feel they are too grown-up and their friends will tease them. It is important that family day care providers find ways to help school-age children to feel more responsible and grown-up and not just "one of the babies."

CONSIDER THE DAILY SCHEDULE AND ACTIVITIES

Whether they come to family day care before school and/or after school, school-age children may always seem to arrive "in the middle of things." If they come before school, the arrival time is often in the middle of your family breakfast and, if you have children of your own, getting them off to school. School-agers' arrival after school often coincides with the end of nap for younger children. It will take careful planning to successfully combine the energetic big kids with the sleepy, slow-moving younger kids. The mixing can be a success, but only if planned and organized to meet the needs of both.

A clear schedule can be posted and discussed with school-age children. This schedule provides for some acknowledgement of their arrival and provides them with a chance to talk about their day. For example, if the younger children are still sleeping you could meet the school-age children at the back door and have them leave their things in a place that would not disturb the younger children.

Together, you could prepare a snack for everyone. This would give the school-agers some time to talk about their school day and/or about what they want to do after snack.

When children arrive after school there is often a need to "unwind." Often this is accomplished through an activity of their choosing, such as drawing, listening to a tape, or eating a snack.

Soon after this unwinding period, the children may be eager to engage in some active play. Remember, they have had few opportunities for physically active play during the day. These children will need lots of space for their active play. Physical games requiring skill, such as baseball, soccer or basketball, need large open areas. Even games such as "red light, green light" or "kick the can" need open spaces.

There are many activities that both school-age and preschool children can enjoy. With art materials like playdough or paper and crayons, children can use them according to their own skill and interest level. Construction toys such as Legos, Lincoln Logs, and Bristle Blocks can also be used by a wide age range. But school-agers usually need more pieces because they tend to create more complex structures. Other materials suited to preschoolers and school-age children alike include sand, dramatic play, and imaginative play with "raw" materials, such as cardboard boxes of all sizes, packing materials, old tires, blankets, etc.

While many activities can be enjoyed in common by children ages 3 through 10, school-age children will want to spend some time with activities that are not suited to the younger child. Building things, such as paper or model airplanes, may require skills and the use of tools beyond the younger child's ability. Playing a game with someone who is your equal is very different than playing with someone who is just learning. Be sure to set aside some time, space and equipment just for the school-agers.

Remember the out-of-school time for school-age children should provide experiences that are different from what they have been doing during the day. But these activities should also make a valuable contribution to children's total development. That means a variety of activities from which they can choose; opportunities to pursue special interests; recreational activities; time to loaf, relax, and be a little silly; and experience with other age groups, including younger children, adults and older people.

SOME SPECIAL CONSIDERATIONS FOR SCHOOL-AGE CARE

Friends: The role of other children becomes very important to school-agers. Friendships take on new meaning. Talk to the school-agers in your care about their feelings of being in care. Think about ways that these older children can be involved with friends. Can a friend come to visit? Can the child visit the friends' house?

Space: As indicated earlier, school-age children need space. They need some space away from younger children to pursue activities and they need large open spaces for physical activities. These may be difficult to provide in the home setting. Space away from others could be a room not used by younger children or an area behind the sofa or piano that is set aside for the school-agers.

If your yard is small and without opportunities for climbing and running, think about other nearby areas that might be used. Is there a nearby park or school yard that the children can use? What limits would you and the parents need to establish so that children can go outside your yard?

Parents and School: There are issues to discuss with parents regarding the care of school-age children. Can the children be involved in activities at the school, in the community or in the neighborhood? How can you establish rules that will be acceptable to the parents, the child and you, and possibly the person who licenses your home?

Be sure you get informed about early school dismissals or special events that might alter the time of care. Parents should keep you informed, but you might want to request a copy of the school newsletter. Parents should also inform the school when you will be providing care for the child.

Other issues to discuss with parents include who will be contacted if the child needs to go home during the day, when should homework be completed and methods of discipline.

A FINAL NOTE

School-agers are bubbling with energy, full of questions and ready to explore the world. If you decide to provide care for school-age children in family day care, be prepared to be challenged. But most of all, have fun!

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Wisconsin Child Care Improvement Project

#12 PLANNING A SCHOOL-AGE CHILD CARE PROGRAM: HOW TO DEVELOP A BUDGET

Determining a reasonable budget is an important step to the planning of any new service, and school-age child care is no exception. Some people look at budgets from the angle of "How much income will I have to work with?", but unfortunately this often leads to unrealistic expections. A better approach asks, "What will it cost to deliver the service that I plan to offer?" From there, reasonable fees can be set, or one can know how much fundraising to do to meet costs.

Unfortunately, there is no one budget that fits all school-age child care programs. Each community has a different set of expenses and expense ranges. Some programs have building or transportation expenses, and others don't, for example. In general, costs tend to be greater in urban areas than they are in rural areas. Below is a worksheet which may help sort through the various costs one might expect when providing group school-age child care.

Begin by estimating the number of children to be served on an average day. This forms the basis for many of the items. It also provides an easy way to revise the budget (both income and expenses) as enrollment increases. (Note that some costs are fixed and others are affected by the numbers that are served.) Once each line item on the worksheet is considered, and the costs expected are filled in, look realistically at sources of income for the program, knowing how much money will be needed to make the program work. It is allowable, however, to go back and adjust the expense allocations after looking at how much income can reasonably be generated. For example, transportation may be eliminated if its cost cannot be covered by the highest fee parents are able to pay. Sometimes it is necessary to go back and forth between income and expenditures several times to get them to balance out. They should balance out, too! Even if it may not be expected for the program to support itself during its first year of operation, all of the sources of income that will be paying the bills should be listed.

SCHOOL-AGE CHILD CARE PROGRAM GENERAL BUDGET WORKSHEET
EXPENSES TO THINK ABOUT

1) PERSONNEL COSTS

_____ Start with the number of staff X hourly wage X number of hours with children.

_____ Add in some set-up and close-up time each day (5-20 minutes on each end).

_____ Add wages for required teacher inservice time (2 hours/month).

_____ If you have more than one school-age program teacher, you will need to add in time for them to meet. (For a group of 20-30 children, 1-3 hours per week is typical.)

_____ Add in 1-2 hours per week planning time for at least the head teacher, and possibly other teachers as well, depending on your structure and job descriptions.

_____ Add about 1-2 hours per month for the head school-age teacher to meet with whomever is their supervisor.

_____ Make sure that you have added in extended day hours, if schools close early on some days.

_____ Plan to begin paying the program staff at least 2 days ahead of the actual start of the program, so that they can get set up. Plan also for some additional training time the first few weeks.

_____ Now add in what you expect to pay a substitute. (Sub hourly rate X 6-10 days off per staff person per school year—look at your personnel policies here!)

_____ Calculate the total of the above, and add in a fringe figure to cover FICA, Unemployment Comp, Workers' Comp, and many other benefits. This will be 10-20% depending on what you offer staff besides required fringes.

_____ *Now*, add about 5% to this figure, "just in case." You are better off planning to pay more and being pleasantly surprised, than coming up short where wages are concerned.

2) NON-PERSONNEL PROGRAM COSTS

_____ Space use costs (rental, donation, etc.).

_____ Additional occupancy cost such as heat/lights.

_____ Additional custodial costs, if any.

_____ Snacks for children (programs typically figure from $.25-.40/child/snack).

_____ Consumable supplies for projects (programs typically budget from $.15-.30/child/day).

_____ Durable equipment for the program (anything from chairs and tables to long-lasting games. Anything that has a usage life of at least a year fits into this category. Programs typically budget from $.05-.15/child/day, depending on how much they furnish themselves.

_____ Transportation costs to and from the center, if you provide this. (Include insurance, if you pay it.)

_____ Transportation costs from program activities and field trips away from the center.

_____ Special events line item: to pay for admission fees, or a special guest to come in to the center.

_____ Cost of having a phone in the program room.

_____ Liability insurance for your program. (Varies greatly depending on program size and perceived risks, but is necessary. A very rough estimate is in the range of $20-60 per child per year, but call your agent for a more exact quote.)

3) ADMINISTRATIVE COSTS

_____ Postage for mailing information about the program and for routine contacts with parents (bills, newsletters, etc.). Varies depending on how much mailing you do, but will probably be in the range of $1-5 per child per year.

_____ Office supplies, printing, copying, office phone, and other office equipment. Some of this may be an in-kind donation, but be realistic about what it costs to run your program and figure in these costs. Most programs do more printing and copying than they expect to.

_____ Publications, resource books, and memberships to professional organizations. These help your staff and keep you current. Include them somewhere in your budget.

_____ Professional services: legal and accounting. At the very least, you will need someone to do an annual tax preparation audit, and most grant sources require a certified audit. You may or may not feel the need to retain an attorney.

_____ Fire/theft insurance (especially if you have expensive equipment such as computers, copiers, etc.).

_____ Administrative support staff: Does the secretary of your Y or school answer parents' calls in the morning? Do you feel the need to include this or part of other people's salaries to your budget? If you add more personnel costs here, be sure to add the same fringe amounts you did above.

_____ And finally, "miscellaneous" stuff, like a gift for the school secretary if you share space, or snacks for a staff party.

AND THE GRAND TOTAL IS:_____.

FACT SHEET #12. Prepared by Jill Ellen Steinberg, WCCIP 1988.

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